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The Will of God

The Badawin, like every Arab or true Muslim, believes that every-
171 thing comes from God, both good and evil. This belief permeates his whole life; hence his stoical calm and resignation when he is faced suddenly with death, loss or ruin.

"God gave, God has been pleased to take away", is an expression continually on his lips.

This piety and resignation to the will of God is one of the most striking traits in the desert man's make-up, and I confess has affected me deeply on more than one occasion, as the following little story will show.

169 My wife and I became very friendly with a certain 'Ajman family in 1930. They roamed about the hinterland of Kuwait and North Hasa, and camped almost every summer on the wells of Abu Halaifa, thirty miles south of Kuwait, or alternatively at Shu'aiba, another ten miles further south. The head of the tent was of the Al Mahfuth branch of the 'Ajman, and was a fine handsome old man of rugged countenance, about sixty years of age. He had four grown-up sons* and one daughter. The daughter, Sarah, was one of the most charming and attractive Badawin girls we had ever met in the Kuwait desert. She was married to a shaikh, Fahad al Fa'aran, a member of the Hithlain or ruling clan of the 'Ajman.

Her husband, a rebel against Bin Sa'ud, had fled to Iraq as a fugitive in 1929, and little Sarah kept house for her father. We often used to visit Sarah's tent, and when no strange men were about, she invariably spread her scarlet bedding or *lahâf* in the women's portion of the tent for us to sit on. She, her father and we, used to discuss desert affairs over a cup of coffee which Sarah invariably handed round herself. Her brothers we rarely saw, as they spent most of their time with the camels.

Sarah had an only boy called 'Abdullah, a pretty trusting little child of two. One day, during the absence of my wife in England, 'Abdullah fell sick with a deadly sickness. I used to go and see him almost daily and did what I could for him, but the child grew worse. When he was fighting for his life it was wonderful to see the love, care and anxiety that both grandfather and mother showered on the child. He was the world to them both, and Sarah used silently to weep as I stood by trying to persuade the boy to drink some soothing medicine

* Two of these died in 1934 and 1935 respectively.

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which would alleviate the fever. As the child's strength declined, the silent grief of the mother was a sore thing to see. I tried hard to persuade her to take him to the doctor in Kuwait, but in vain. One morning according to my custom I came to visit the sick child. As I approached Sarah's tent, Sarah came out to greet me dressed in her best festive garments. Smiling and dry-eyed, she invited me as usual into her portion of the tent. Her father was away. I sat down, suspecting something, I knew not what, but I said nothing. Sarah made coffee and brought it to me to drink. She even joked and told an amusing story. Presently I said "Where is little 'Abdullah? How is he?" Poor Sarah with a great effort choked down a sob and pointed to a small heap of earth not twenty yards from the tent. "There he lies," said she, "half an hour ago I laid him to rest; God gave him to me, and God has taken him, thanks be to God."

Just then Sarah's father came up, and when I expressed my sorrow and sympathy to him, he laughed loud and gruffly and said, *Al hamd ul'Illah* (the praise be to God). "He will give us another, and perhaps many more. We 'Ajman are fighting men, and God in his mercy does as he pleases, we must always laugh at death, whether it comes by sickness, or by bullet." The whole picture left an indelible mark on my mind and it will be long before I forget the dry-eyed sorrowing Sarah.

The poor girl lost her husband a year later—he divorced her because he couldn't return from Iraq. Little Sarah eventually went to Najd and Riyadh, and there married one of Bin Sa'ud's principal *fiddwis* or guards. She wrote and told me a year after, that she had got another little boy. My diary records also that in October 1933 she presented her husband with a little girl. In 1936 I heard through her father that smallpox had carried off one of the children. Poor Sarah.*

PRAYER

The Badawin is very punctilious about his prayers. Whether in camp or on the march, he solemnly prays five times a day according

* Sarah came up to Kuwait from Riyadh in February 1938, and once again we saw our old friend. She came with her father and showed us her new baby boy. She said she had a girl of four also, whom she had left in her tent in the desert.